

# A Study of an Unpublished Book of Hours in the Library of Calvary Episcopal Church, Louisville, Kentucky

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During the late Middle Ages hundreds of Books of Hours were executed throughout Europe. The production of these books was prolific and standardized to contain the various scriptural readings and prayers to be conducted at established times during the day. While the observance of the canonical hours dates back to Saint Benedict and the monastic custom of the sixth century, by the end of the Middle Ages the Hours were observed in private, as well as in the church or abbey. This personalization of devotion paralleled, and was in part a development of, the increased reverence for the Virgin Mary, the mother of Christ. A special office, or formal sequence of worship, in Mary's honor had developed over the centuries and by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries had nearly replaced the Psalms as the principle means of giving expression to personal piety. Thus, the Book of Hours became the most intimate devotional book, guiding these individual acts of worship, and had as its central text the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Because Books of Hours were for individual rather than institutional use, the market for them was significantly greater than for any other religious work at this time. Moreover, due to the increase in urban prosperity and the rise of the middle class, greater numbers of people could aspire to the ownership of a Book, which had also acquired the status of an accessible luxury product.

The Book of Hours in the library of Calvary Episcopal Church in Louisville, Kentucky is in excellent condition and has never been published. It includes thirteen half-page and twelve smaller miniatures. The manuscript measures 17.5 x 12.5 centimeters and is written on one hundred and ten leaves of sturdy parchment. There are several prickings for marginal ruling or lining. The Calendar is ruled for one column of seventeen lines, with a written area of 10.2 x 6.4 centimeters. The text of the *Calvary Hours* is ruled for one column of eighteen lines, with a written area of 10.2 x 6.4 centimeters. Ruling is executed throughout in pale red ink. The script is written in a regular Gothic bookhand in at least two or perhaps three hands. In the Calendar gold is used for the titles of the months and the major feasts, and red and blue are used alternately for the remaining entries. All of the text of the *Calvary Hours*, except for folios 60-64, is written in another uniform style in brownish-black ink. In folios 60-64 a slightly smaller script written in paler ink is used. Antiphons, versicles, and responses are written in smaller script in red ink, and capitals are indicated by strokes of liquid gold. The text is rubricated throughout.

The book begins with a Calendar which is a list of the days for celebrating the feasts of the Church and of the saints (see *Athamor* back cover). Entries in the Calendar are written in different colored inks—gold, red, blue—which have a functional purpose. Important Church festivals such as Christmas and Easter, as well as the feast days of

apostles and other major saints, are written in gold or red. The lesser festivals are noted in blue. The names of local saints with a restricted cult may appear in gold, red or blue. The Calendar helps to localize the saints and their regional cults.

The Calendar in the *Calvary Book of Hours* is complete with entries for every day of the year. The Calendar appears to be Parisian because of the various saints mentioned in it. The entry of Geneviève in gold suggests Paris usage.<sup>1</sup> This saint's name is repeated in red on November 26, the date of the translation of her relics. Other entries in blue or red which are significant of Paris include Saints Germanus (May 28), Landericus (or Landri, June 10), Lucanus (October 30), and Leon (November 12).

Following the Calendar are the Sequences or Gospel passages from the four Evangelists. On the first page of each of the Gospel-sequences is a miniature of the Evangelist writing or reading his Gospel and accompanied by his attribute. The largest of the Evangelist portraits is that of Saint John, which occupies a half page (Figure 1). He is shown on the island of Patmos writing his account of the second coming of Christ. The landscape is executed in a loose, sketchy style, with the sky treated with gradations of blue. The interest in illusionistic space and depth, as well as the expressionless face of Saint John and placid pose, reflect the influence of the early Italian Renaissance.

The two universally popular prayers to the Virgin Mary, the *Obsecro te* and *O intemerata* follow the sequences. The *Obsecro te* (meaning 'I implore thee') is illustrated with a *Pietà* in a landscape setting. The second prayer, the *O intemerata* (or 'O matchless one'), is illustrated with a *Virgo lactans* or nursing Madonna.

Immediately following these prayers is the most important element of the text, the Hours of the Virgin. Each Canonical Hour is illustrated with a half-page miniature, surrounded by geometric gold borders, decorated initials, and various other decorative motifs. The style of the miniatures is more refined and carefully executed than those found in other parts of the book. Since the iconography of the Hours of the Virgin deals with the events in the life of Mary, she is present in each scene except for the Angel's Annunciation to the Shepherds. The *Calvary Hours* offers the following scenes:

Matins	The Annunciation
Lauds	The Visitation
Prime	The Nativity
Terce	The Annunciation to the Shepherds
Sext	The Adoration of the Magi
None	The Presentation in the Temple
Vespers	The Flight into Egypt
Compline	The Coronation of the Virgin

In the *Annunciation* miniature the Virgin Mary is dressed in contemporary garments and is seated in an interior decorated with Renaissance motifs, such as the marble veneering on the wall surface (Figure 2). Highlights are achieved by hatching in brushed gold on the drapery and architectural elements. An interesting feature of this narrative scene is the inclusion of the woman kneeling in prayer before the Madonna. This is a common depiction and is found in many Books of Hours. It does confirm the fact that a large proportion of the devotional books was intended for use by women.<sup>2</sup> It is probable that the woman depicted is the donor or patroness of the *Calvary Hours*.

The *Angel's Annunciation to the Shepherds* is a miniature always worth close scrutiny because it gave artists an opportunity to depict a landscape inhabited by peasants (see *Athanasius* cover). In terms of style and composition the scene is one of the most successful miniatures in the *Calvary Hours*. The shepherds are depicted in the foreground, with an idyllic landscape in the background. The composition is well-balanced and carefully conceived. The coloring is bright and warm, with green used for the hillside and gradations of blue for the sky. The garments of the shepherds are highlighted with gold cross-hatching.

The Hours of the Virgin are followed by the Seven Penitential Psalms, which express grief, consciousness of sin and hope of redemption.<sup>3</sup> In earlier sections of the book the themes and subjects available to artists have been largely standardized, but in the Penitential Psalms there is more flexibility. The most obvious choice of subject, King David, the supposed author of the Psalms, is shown as an old man kneeling in penitence with his crown on his head and his harp by his side. God the Father is depicted at an open window. The miniaturist shows an understanding of the placement of a figure in a barrel-vaulted interior.

The Litany, essentially a cry for help and one of the oldest forms of liturgical prayer, customarily follows the Penitential Psalms. It consists of invocations of the Holy Trinity, the Virgin Mary, the Archangels, and a long list of major saints. In addition, the *Calvary Hours* includes 'local' saints commonly venerated in Northern France, such as Saints Vincent, Sebastian, Martin, Margaret and Lucy.

The short Hours of the Cross and the Hours of the Holy Spirit follow the Litany. The Hours of the Cross are illustrated with a Crucifixion scene placed in a panoramic setting. Pentecost was chosen as the theme of the miniature illustrating the Hours of the Holy Spirit.

The Office of the Dead (*Officium defunctorum*) is the last section of the *Calvary Hours* that contains a half-page miniature. These prayers were spoken in the church choir over the coffin of the deceased during the vigil before burial. The Office of the Dead is one of the most important elements in Books of Hours and exhibited an even wider choice of subjects for illustration than the Penitential Psalms. In the miniature a woman is shown being scourged by an allegorical figure of death (Figure 4). The scene takes place in a cemetery with stylized grave markers in the background. The subject of this miniature is derived from the late fifteenth century theme of the Dance of the Dead (or more specifically to the *Memento Mori*), which served as a vivid reminder of the imminence of death usually with a moral significance.<sup>4</sup>

The final section of the *Calvary Book of Hours* consists of the *memoriae* of the saints. Devotion to the saints, especially to one's patron or personal saint, was an essential

part of medieval religious life. The variety of saints found in Books of Hours, often the choice of the patrons, contributes greatly to the individuality of these books. The saints included in the *Calvary Hours* are Michael, John the Baptist, James, Sebastian, Mary Magdalen, Catherine, Barbara and Margaret. A particularly interesting miniature is that of Saint Sebastian (Figure 5). Sebastian is depicted as a young man carrying a bow and arrow. This unorthodox portrayal transforms the scene of martyrdom into a triumph of the saint displaying the instruments of his martyrdom.

The style of the miniatures in the *Calvary Book of Hours* is typical for late fifteenth century Northern French illumination. Human figures are solid. Little or no indication of the anatomy is shown beneath the massive drapery. Although the faces of the figures are carefully modelled in gray and white, the artist made few attempts at individualizing. Color tends to be flat and modelling is achieved, primarily, through the use of gold or white highlighting. The extensive application of gold on the draperies of the figures and landscape elements is another characteristic of late fifteenth century French illumination. The placid poses and unemotional faces reflect the influence of the Italian Renaissance. The gestures are undramatic and the architectural and landscape settings are uncluttered.

A comparison between the *Presentation in the Temple* of the *Calvary Hours* and that of *Manuscript 13*, Waddesdon Collection shows striking similarities (Figures 6 and 7).<sup>5</sup> In both compositions the narrative is located in an interior architectural setting. The emotionless expressions are characteristic of both miniatures. The composition of the figures is essentially the same, except for the inclusion of Anna in the *Calvary Hours*. The Christ Child is clearly the focus of both works.

All text pages in the *Calvary Book of Hours* including the Calendar pages, are decorated with geometric borders. These borders not only give sparkle to the pages, but also can be used as a dating tool. The borders consist of acanthus leaves in blue and gold, naturalistic flowers, brushed gold dots edged with black ink and solid black dots. All of the borders include large geometric areas—circles, triangles, bars, chevrons, and other irregular shapes such as hearts and fleurs-de-lis—which are delineated with black ink and painted with brushed gold. The style of these borders is characteristic of manuscripts executed in the last quarter of the fifteenth century.

A comparison with Giovanni Boccaccio's *De Casibus Vivorum Illustrium*, a block-book in the Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. and the *Calvary Hours* demonstrates how common and standardized the geometric gold borders were during the late fifteenth century. The miniature in the *De Casibus Vivorum Illustrium* is surrounded by virtually identical acanthus sprays and naturalistic flowers. This comparison is also useful as a dating tool because of the inclusion of a colophon. This colophon gives the exact date and location: Paris, November 4, 1494. On the basis of the style of the borders, the *De Casibus Vivorum Illustrium* is the most concrete dating tool for the *Calvary Hours* (Figures 8 and 9).<sup>6</sup>

The only positive evidence about the origin of the *Calvary Hours* comes from the text. The Calendar and the use of the Hours of the Virgin point to the Ile-de-France, possibly Paris.<sup>7</sup> A date toward the last two decades of the fifteenth century is suggested by the development of the border decoration and the style of the miniatures. The gold

geometric patterns are a later development of the uniform gold background that was already in use around 1470. The architectural frames for miniatures that was in vogue after 1500 do not appear in the *Calvary Hours*. Moreover,

because of the comparison with the precisely dated *De Casibus Vivorum Illustrium* (i.e., November 4, 1494), it is most probable that the *Calvary Book of Hours* was executed between 1490 and 1500.

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1 L.M.J. Delaissé, "The Importance of Books of Hours for the History of the Medieval Book", *Gatherings in Honor of Dorothy Miner*, Baltimore, Md., 1974, 266.

4 Abbé Leroquais, *Les livres d'heures manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, I, Paris, 1927, 27.

2 John Harthan, *The Book of Hours*, New York, 1977, 12.

5 Delaissé, 295.

3 The Seven Penitential Psalms owe their name to the sixth century monk Cassiodorus, a former Roman prefect who so labeled them in his *Commentary* on the Psalms. Harthan, 14.

6 C.A. Goodrum, *Treasures of the Library of Congress*, New York, 1980, 17.

7 Delaissé, 283.

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Fig. 1, *St. John on Patmos*, *Calvary Hours*, Louisville, Kentucky, Calvary Episcopal Church.

Fig. 2, *Annunciation*, *Calvary Hours*, Louisville, Kentucky, Calvary Episcopal Church.



Fig. 3. *David in Penitence*, *Calvary Hours*, Louisville, Kentucky, Calvary Episcopal Church.



Fig. 4. *Scene of Death*, *Calvary Hours*, Louisville, Kentucky, Calvary Episcopal Church.



Fig. 5. *Saint Sebastian*, *Calvary Hours*, Louisville, Kentucky, Calvary Episcopal Church.



Fig. 6. *Presentation in the Temple*, *Calvary Hours*, Louisville, Kentucky, Calvary Episcopal Church.



Fig. 7, *Manuscript 13*, Waddesdon Collection (Reproduced in L.M.J. Delaissé, De Wit, J., and Morrow, J. *Illuminated Manuscripts: James A. De Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor*. Fribourg, Switzerland: Office du Livre, 1977, p. 243.)



Fig. 8, Giovanni Boccaccio, *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., November 4, 1494.



Fig. 9, *Visitation*, *Calvary Hours*, Louisville, Kentucky, Calvary Episcopal Church.